

KURTZ, ADAM, HOUSE (Washington's Headquarters)  
NE corner of S Braddock and W Cork sts.  
Winchester  
Virginia

HABS No. VA-699

HABS  
VA,  
35-WIN,  
5-

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D. C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

ADAM KURTZ HOUSE  
(Washington's Headquarters)

HABS No. VA-699

Location: Northeast corner of South Braddock and West Cork sts.  
Winchester  
Virginia

Present Owner: City of Winchester

Present Occupant: City of Winchester

Present Use: Museum

Statement of Significance: This small building is certainly one of the oldest buildings in Winchester today. Each of its three rooms is of different construction: stone, hewn logs, and round logs--the log portions now covered on the exterior with siding. According to local tradition, stated on the bronze plaque fastened to the west wall of the building, the building was used by George Washington as an office while he was a surveyor in the locality in 1749-1753, and later, in 1756-1757 while he was supervising construction of Fort Loudoun at the north edge of Winchester. No documentation, however, for Washington's association with the building has been found.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Physical History

1. Dates of erection: Not known with certainty. A building was standing on the site in 1764, because a deed of that date for adjoining land refers to Thomas Rutherford living on the property. It would thus seem that at least one portion of the building, which appears to be the central part (i. e., that built of hewn logs), was standing then. Accurate documentation for anything earlier does not exist, as far as this writer knows. The dates of the additions are not known, but the distinctly different forms of each of the two added rooms--one stone and the other round logs--seems to indicate that each room was added at a different time. The fact that Adam Kurtz, who purchased the property in 1778, had a large family, <sup>makes</sup> it seems probable that by 1800 both additions had been built (See deeds of 1818; Russell, p. 35).

## 2. Original and subsequent owners:

- 1759 Deed 5 Sept. 1759, recorded 5 Sept 1759 in Frederick County, Virginia, Deed Book No. 5, p. 263  
James Wood and Mary Wood, his wife, of Frederick County  
to  
Thomas Rutherford  
For 20 pounds, a lot No. 12 with 105 feet frontage on Braddock Street and 188 feet depth eastward at right angles to Braddock Street. The lot adjoined lot No. 11 and had an area of 19,740 square feet. (Note: This lot was actually 105'-2" wide and 188'-6" deep (Quarles, Streets, p. 13).)
- 1764 6 Feb. 1764, recorded 6 (or 8?) Feb. 1764 in Frederick County, Virginia, Deed Book No. 9, p. 100  
Mary Wood, widow and relict of James Wood  
to  
Thomas Rutherford  
Note: This is a deed for a different lot, to the south and across the street from lot No. 12, but in it is mentioned the fact that Thomas Rutherford lives on lot No. 12.
- 1778 Deed 7 May 1778, recorded 7 May 1778 in Frederick County, Virginia, Deed Book No. 17, p. 464  
Thomas Rutherford, Esq., of Berkeley County, and  
Drusilla Rutherford, his wife  
to  
Adam Kurtz of Winchester  
For 100 pounds, lot No. 12.
- 1801 Deed 4 July 1801, recorded 3 Sept 1801 in Winchester, Virginia, Deed Book No. 1, p. 232  
James Smith and Hannah Smith, his wife, of Frederick County  
to  
Adam Kurtz of Winchester  
For 44 pounds, the southern 52'-6" of lot No. 11 on the east side of Braddock Street and adjoining lot No. 12 on the north. The part of lot No. 11 to the north of the part conveyed by this deed had belonged to Jesse Pugh before James Smith bought it. (Note: Kurtz now had a lot that was 157'-8" in north-south direction and 188'-6" in east-west direction.)
- 1818 Deed 22 Aug. 1818, recorded 22 Aug. 1818 in Winchester, Virginia, Deed Book No. 1, p. 55  
William Jones and Susanna Jones, his wife (nee Kurtz), one of the children of Adam Kurtz, deceased  
to  
Isaac Kurtz, Abraham Kurtz, Catharine Kurtz, Elizabeth Kurtz and Julian(sic) Kurtz (later in the document spelled Julia Ann  
For \$188.33, their claim to a certain house and lot in which Adam Kurtz formerly lived, which by his will of 6 M-y 1814 he devised to his wife Mary during her life and, on her death, to his children, to be equally divided.

- 1818 Deed 27 Aug. 1818, recorded 3 Sept. 1818 in Winchester, Virginia, Deed Book No. 4, p. 5  
Jacob Kurtz and Mary Kurtz, his wife; John Haas and Sarah Haas, his wife, nee Kurtz; Henry Linn and Rebecca Linn, his wife, nee Kurtz; George Bostian and Maria Bostian, his wife, nee Kurtz; heirs and devisees of Adam Kurtz, late of Winchester  
to  
Isaac Kurtz, Abraham Kurtz, Catharine Kurtz, Elisabeth Kurtz, and Julia Ann Kurtz, of Winchester  
For \$1200, Lot 12 and the part of Lot 11 purchased in 1801. The house is mentioned in the deed.
- 1822 Deed 20 May 1822, recorded 20 May 1822 in Winchester, Virginia, Deed Book No. 4, p. 449  
Elizabeth Kurtz  
to  
Isaac Kurtz and Abraham Kurtz  
For \$300, her share of the land conveyed in the 1818 deed (the second one) and in addition her share in three outlots.
- 1828 Deed 15 June 1828, recorded 1 Jan. 1829 in Winchester, Virginia, Deed Book No. 6, p. 258  
Adam Kurtz and Elisabeth Kurtz, his wife; Isaac Kurtz, Peter Kurtz, Catharine Kurtz, and Julian Kurtz, heirs and children of Adam Kurtz, deceased  
to  
Solomon Dodds of Winchester  
The north 50 feet of the 52'-6" wide parcel of land that Adam Kurtz purchased in 1801. (Note: As a result of this deed, the Kurtz land is now 107'-8" in the north-south direction, and the 188'-6" east-west dimension remains unchanged.)
- 1849 Deed 14 Mar. 1849, recorded 14 March 1849 in Winchester, Virginia, Deed Book No. 9, p. 242  
Abraham Kurtz; Isaac Kurtz and Frances Kurtz, his wife; and Catharine Kurtz  
to  
Julia Kurtz  
For \$300 to Abraham, Isaac, and Frances, and sisterly love and affection for Catharine, the 107'-8" by 188'-6" lot.
- 1856 Deed 30 Jan. 1856, recorded 2 Feb. 1856 in Winchester, Virginia, Deed Book No. 10, p. 224  
Julia A. Kurtz  
to  
Robert I. Kurtz  
For \$200, a strip 30 feet wide off the north of the lot. (Note: The remaining lot is now 77'-8" wide by 188'-6".)

1862 Deed 28 July 1862, recorded 30 July 1862 in  
Winchester, Virginia, Deed Book No. 11, p. 141  
Julia Kurtz

to

George W. Kurtz and Mary Elizabeth Kurtz, children of  
Isaac Kurtz, deceased; Mary E. Kurtz, Rebecca A. Kurtz,  
Julia V. Kurtz, Robert I. Kurtz, John A. Kurtz, and  
Peter L. Kurtz, children of Abraham Kurtz deceased (all  
being nieces and nephews of Julia Kurtz), all of Winchester.

(1) To nephew George W. Kurtz and niece Mary Eliza-  
beth Kurtz, for natural love and affection, the west 47  
feet of the lot. (Note: The remaining portion is thus  
77'-8" wide and 141'-6" deep)

(2) To Mary E. Kurtz, for support of herself and  
Rebecca Kurtz and Julia Kurtz, for natural love and affect-  
ion, the remaining portion of the lot.

1908 Deed 10 Feb. 1908, recorded 12 Feb. 1908 in  
Winchester, Virginia, Deed Book No. 27, p. 272  
M. M. Lynch, Special Commissioner

to

City of Winchester

For \$2460, lot with buildings and improvements at the  
northeastern corner of Braddock and Cork Streets, known  
as Washington Headquarters, with 78'-4" frontage on  
Braddock and about 142'-3" on Cork St. This is the same  
land conveyed by Julia Kurtz to Mary S. Kurtz in 1862.

4. Builder, contractor: Not known.

5. Notes on original plan and construction of building: The  
building consists of three rooms in an east-west line. The  
western room has two of its three exterior walls of stone con-  
struction, and its interior wall is of horizontal siding boards  
resembling those used on the exterior or the rest of the building.  
In addition, there is a vertical line of joints in the stonework  
of the south foundation wall and in the north wall as well.  
These facts establish the west room as an addition.

The central portion is of hewn log construction and con-  
tains the fireplace and the boxed-in ship's ladder giving  
access to the attic. These facts seem to establish the center  
portion as the first portion built. However, there is no line  
of vertical joints in the stonework of the south foundation wall.  
(The north foundation wall is below grade).

The north wall of the stone addition to the west is not of  
stone construction. It is covered with the same siding used  
on the exterior of the rest of the building and it is not thick  
enough to be of stone. Short lengths of floorboards in this  
room indicate flooring over of a previous interior means of access  
to the cellar under this room. The present cellar access from  
the exterior is, therefore, a change in the original building.  
It is the writer's belief that the stone wall on the north side  
of the building was removed when it was necessary to construct  
the cellar access from the exterior because it was too difficult  
for the builder to provide a lintel for this cellar access that  
would support the stone wall above. By this reasoning, the north  
wall of the addition is presumed to have been of stone.

The east room is likewise assumed to have been an addition, because of its different materials of construction, because of the way the center room is built (as mentioned), and because of the floor level and ceiling level 19 inches and 31 inches lower respectively. Since the roof of the whole building is one continuous gable form, the lower ceiling in the east room allows for more headroom in the attic above this room. This attic is finished on the interior and floored.

6. Notes on known alterations and additions, with dates and architects: The early additions have been described in connection with the description of the original structure.

A photograph dated at the end of the nineteenth century shows the building with novelty siding in place of the present wooden siding and with a stoop in front of the south entrance. In connection with the restoration work planned by the city in 1908, mention was made of removing the weatherboards (i. e., the novelty siding) and replacing them with plank as originally covered the logs, replacing the solid shutters that had previously been on the windows, and removing the old kitchen. The kitchen was not obvious on the old photograph; it must have been on the north or east of the building. Mention is also made of stone from an old chimney, but it is not said if this was a chimney in the kitchen that was to be removed or if it was a part of the building presently standing. Two possibilities exist: that the present fireplace was rebuilt, or that there was another fireplace, which was removed. If the latter be the case, it is possible that it was located at the north wall of the stone addition. (Quarles, Homes, p. 138). It was also mentioned that the Board appointed by the city to be responsible for the restoration of the building consulted with "historical architects," but their names are not mentioned, and it is assumed that their services were purely of an informal and advisory nature. (Quarles, Homes, p. 138)

When the city was considering purchase of the property, the City Solicitor doubted if the city council had the authority to purchase property for the purpose of preserving a historic building. He stated that the city had authority only to hold real estate for the "necessary public purposes," and he suggested that the way to get around this restriction would be by making a park at the site, which presumably the city did have the authority to do. (Evening Star, "A Busy Meeting...")

Historic Events and Persons Associated with the Building.

The association of George Washington with the building is based entirely on a local oral tradition. When on 4 February 1908 the Winchester City Council voted final approval of the ordinance for the purchase of the property, one member only questioned the authenticity of the claim that Washington used the building as his headquarters. Mayor H. H. Baker approved on 3 March 1908 the ordinance for the purchase of the building and presented a statement of his examination of the history of the property. The statement is given in its entirety by the editors of Russell. It is curious that the statement deals with only one of the alleged periods of use by Washington, the first period, when he is said to have used it as a surveyor's office; no mention is made of his use of the building as a military headquarters later. Mayor Baker said: "I believe there is no reasonable doubt that the middle room was a block-house and was used by Washington in tabulating his work as a surveyor or when he was employed by Lord Fairfax to survey the lands claimed by him around Winchester." Baker states that he was indebted to the researches of Thomas K. Cartmell, whose then forthcoming book would corroborate his belief in Washington's use of the building. (Russell, pp. 42, 43). Cartmell's book was published in 1909, and it brings forth evidence said to be contained in the deed of one of the tracts of land which Washington himself purchased "from George Johnson, a member of the Winchester Bar. The agreement for this purchase shows that it was executed in Winchester, and in the law office of Mr. Johnston. This office was used by Washington while in town, when plotting surveys." (Cartmell, p. 250) The present writer examined the deed referred to (Lease and Release, 16 March 1752, Frederick County, Virginia, Deed Book No. 2, p. 476 and p. 478) and found no mention of the office of Johnston in either the lease or the release. Cartmell's following statement about Washington's use of the law office must only be repetition of the local oral tradition. Washington, however, did survey in the Shenandoah Valley. His first experience there was in the spring of 1748 as a boy sixteen years of age, and he returned in 1749, 1750, and 1752 (Freeman, I; 202, 203, 213-216, 223, 237, 240, 242, 243, 259).

Washington's use of the building in 1757 and 1758 as headquarters is said to have taken place while he was in charge of Virginia troops garrisoned at Winchester for defense of the settlements of the Shenandoah Valley, which had been attacked by the French and the Indians leading up to and during the French and Indian War. He arrived in Winchester on 6 March 1756. After assessing the situation, he urged the construction of a fort in the city to defend it, and after obtaining Governor Dinwiddie's approval in June of that year, began construction in the following month. By November the fort was partly completed, and construction continued on through the summer of 1758 (Freeman II: 171, 199, 200, 225, 254; Fitzpatrick II, 195, 208). But no mention of any particular building used as headquarters was found in either of these works.

The tradition for use as an office rests on what was handed down in the Kurtz family: "The story that the block-house was occupied as a lawyer's office by George Johnstone (sic), and that Washington did his clerical work as a surveyor in this room, and sometimes slept here with his friend, was handed down..." (Russell, p. 44 Note 33).

In a conversation between Dr. Garland R. Quarles, a local historian, and the writer on 3 August 1972, Dr. Quarles expressed doubts concerning the uses of the building as Washington's surveyor's office. First, the land that Washington was surveying was at some distance from Winchester. Secondly, the land around Winchester had already largely been surveyed by 1749. Third, as a surveyor, Washington would have accumulated his data in the field for many surveys, staying out for extending periods of time. If he used any office, it would have most likely been the one of Lord Fairfax's estate south of Winchester.

In further discussion on the same date with Dr. Quarles the use of the building as a headquarters was examined. This use has a consistency with the facts. Washington's use of land in the immediate vicinity of the building as a stockade for his soldiers appears to be accurately documented, and it is possible that he did use the building. Perhaps this fact is the germ of the local tradition.

The writer, however, notes again that the building would have been built before James Wood subdivided the land into lots, therefore earlier than the 1759 deed, in which the lot was sold for 20 pounds. Since the lot sold again in 1778 for one hundred pounds, it is strongly suggested that there was a building erected upon it during that time and that there had been no building on it before 1764. These facts cast some doubt on the existence of any structure on the property prior to its purchase in 1759.

Adam Kurtz was a member of Captain Daniel Morgan's Company of Riflemen at Quebec, Canada, in 1775-1776, and was taken prisoner. (Cartmell, p. 103).

Isaac Kurtz was a member of the First Infantry Company recruited by Captain Morgan, which later became known as Cavalry Company No. 4 in the War of 1812 (Cartmell, p. 106).

#### Sources of Information

Primary and unpublished sources.

Frederick County, Virginia. Deed Book No. 5, No. 9, No. 17.

Winchester, Virginia. Deed Book No. 1, No. 4, No. 6, No. 9, No. 10, No. 11, No. 27.

Conversation: Garland R. Quarles and the writer, 3 Aug. 1972.

Secondary and published sources.

Cartmell, T. K. Shenandoah Valley Pioneers and Their Descendants: A History of Frederick County, Virginia, from Its Formulation in 1738 to 1908. Compiled Mainly from Original Records of Old Frederick County, Now Hampshire, Berkeley, Shenandoah, Jefferson, Hardy, Clarke, Warren, Morgan and Frederick. Winchester, Va: Eddy Press Corp., 1909.

Evening Star and Morning News. (Winchester, Va.) "A Busy Meeting of City Council," Feb. 5, 1908, pp. 1, 2.

Fitzpatrick, John C., ed. The Writings of George Washington from the Original Manuscript Sources: 1745-1799. Vol. 1: 1745-1756; Vol. 2: 1757-1769. Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1931.



Freeman, Douglas Southall. George Washington, A Biography.  
Vols. 1 & 2: Young Washington. New York: Charles  
Scribner's Sons, 1948.

Quarles, Garland R. The Story of One Hundred Old Homes in Winchester, Virginia. Winchester, Virginia: Farmers and Merchants National Bank, 1967. (Noted Quarles in text)

\* Russell, William Greenway. What I Know About Winchester: Recollections of William Greenway Russell 1800-1891. Staunton, Va: Wallace Publishing Co., 1933

Likely sources not yet investigated. None known.

## Part II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### Detailed Description of Exterior.

1. Condition of fabric: Good.
2. Overall dimensions: 16 feet wide at the west end. 51 feet 1  $\frac{1}{2}$  inches at the south side. The south side dimensions are made up as follows: 14 feet 0 inches is the length of the stone wall at the west end of the south wall; 13 feet 0  $\frac{1}{2}$  inches is the length of the siding of the center portion, from its west end to the point where the bottom of the siding steps down; 12 feet 1 inch is the length of the eastern part of the siding, from the step mentioned above to the southeast corner of the building. The divisions of the south wall correspond roughly to the lengths of the three rooms within.
3. Number of bays: Not applicable.
4. One, plus an attic above the east room and a cellar under the west room.
5. Layout, shape: Rectangle.
6. Foundations; Rubble limestone. There is a vertical joint the full height of the foundation walls where the foundation of the west room joins the rest of the building. There is no vertical continuous joint where the foundation of the east room connects to that of the center room at the south wall. The comparable connection at the north wall is not visible because the grade level is at the top of the wall.
7. Wall construction, finish, and color: The west and south walls of the west room are <sup>light gray</sup> rubble limestone with dressed quoins at the exterior corners and at the east end of the south stone wall where it joins the center room. The remaining exterior walls are surfaced in planks of one inch net thickness nailed to furring strips. The planks run horizontally and are shaped with the upper and lower edges cut at about a 45-degree angle in order to make a water-tight horizontal lap joint. The lower edges of the planks is beaded. The planks are wider at the south wall, about 12 inches, than at the other two walls, and are stained a dark brown color.

\*Quarles, Garland R. The Streets of Winchester, Virginia. Winchester, Virginia: Farmers and Merchants National Bank, no publication date. (Noted Quarles, Streets, in text)

8. Structural system, framing: Since the exterior siding face extended out beyond the face of the foundation, and since the siding was placed on furring strips, it was possible to look up under the open lower edge of this siding and see the log construction of the walls beneath. The center portion of the building is constructed of hewn logs, and the east room is constructed of round logs. The floor framing of the west room is logs about 7 to 8 inches in diameter, flattened on the upper side, and placed at 27 inches on centers. The floor framing of the center room is 3 by 6 joists, sawn, appearing to be material installed in the 1908 restoration. The floor framing of the east room was not visible. The roof framing of the center and east parts was joists set at about two feet on centers and of material about 3 inches square, according to appearance. Measurements were not taken here.

9. Porches, stoops, bulkheads, etc. None. Cellar access stair in hatchway accessible from the exterior has stone walls that do not bond with the foundation walls.

10. Chimneys: Brick for the fireplace, galvanized steel for the warm-air furnace.

11. Doorways and doors: The north doors are vertical planks with battens on the interior: the center-room door is one inch thick, 34 inches wide and 68 inches high; the east room door is similar in construction and is 32 inches wide and 77½ inches high. The two doors on the south wall have diagonal boards on the exterior, but their interiors resemble the north doors.

12. Windows and shutters: The two windows in the stone walls are spanned by stone lintels. In the center and the east rooms, the windows are sash, 6/6. In the west room there are 9/6 sash in the two stone walls and a small casement window in the wooden wall on the north side. At all windows there are solid shutters of vertical boards with horizontal battens, mounted with strap hinges on pintles.

13. Roof shape, covering: The roof is one simple gable in shape and is covered with grey slates.

14. Cornice, eaves: There is only a slight projection at the eaves, which are formed by a simple wooden molding whose form, from the top down, is an ovolo, fillet, and cavetto; i. e., a concave curve, a narrow flat band, and a concave curve.

15. Dormers, Cupolas, Towers: None.

#### Detailed Description of Interior

1. Floor plans: The first floor consists simply of three rooms in line, on an east-west axis. The floor of the west room is 13" lower than that of the center room, and the floor of the east room is 19" lower. The fireplace is centered on the east wall of the center room.

There is an attic space above the east room, and there is more headroom in this part of the attic than elsewhere because the ceiling of the first-floor east room is 31 inches lower than the center-room ceiling.

There is a cellar excavated under the west room, and its space connects with the shallow excavated space under the center room because there is no stone foundation under the west wall of the center room. The cellar has a dirt floor.

2. Stairways: There is a very steep ships ladder enclosed at the south side of the fireplace in the center room. The ships ladder ascends about six feet, then after a right-angle turn, there are normal treads that complete the stairway to the attic.

3. Flooring: In the west and center rooms the flooring is random width pine planks,  $12\frac{1}{2}$  inches at the widest and fitting tightly. In the east room the flooring is similar pine boards, but they are of uniform width here, about  $8\frac{3}{4}$  inches, and do not fit as well. All are nailed, with the nail heads quite visible.

4. Wall and ceiling finish: Center room: Plaster walls with a 36-inch high wainscot of  $13\frac{1}{2}$ -inch wide boards running horizontally and beaded. There is a rectangular cap molding, molded at the lower side only. The ceiling is of planks,  $13\frac{1}{2}$  inches wide with beaded edges, stained brown. The wainscot is painted brown. There is no wainscot on the fireplace wall.

West room: Plaster walls, beaded plank ceiling like the center room, painted. The east wall of the room, however, is formed of horizontal planks, like those on the exterior of the building, painted. Chair rail.

East room: Plaster walls, chair rail. Ceiling is formed of the floor planks of the attic above, supported on floor beams spaced about 40 inches apart. Most of the beams are about  $5\frac{1}{2}$  inches square, but some are rectangular in cross section.

*Attic over east room: Boards and battens on walls and ceiling.*

5. Doorways and doors: The door between the center and west rooms is three vertical planks,  $3/4$  inches thick, with two horizontal battens. Door and window trim is flat with an outer molding.

6. Special decorative features, trim, and cabinet work: The baseboards, which are found in the east and west rooms, have a bead at the top corner and are about 6 inches high. In the west room there is a peg rail on the south wall behind the door, and there is evidence of five pegs having been fastened into it. There are deep reveals faced with wood at the windows of the east and west rooms. The windows in the center room are set near the interior face of the wall. The fireplace mantelpiece is simple, of wood; the fireplace itself is now plastered, and the hearth is of painted brick.

7. Notable hardware: Strap hinges for most of the doors. Some iron thumbblatches.

8. Mechanical equipment: Modern forced-warm-air furnace, electric wiring, toilet in cellar.

Site and surroundings:

General setting: The long sides of the building face north and south. The building is at the northeast corner of Cork St. (which runs east and west) and South Braddock Street.

Historic landscape design: None. The building is at the southwest corner of the site, and the rest of the site has been devoted to a park. In the park is a monument of a small cannon mounted on a stone pedestal, on which there is a plaque inscribed as follows: "This monument marks the trail taken by the army of General Braddock, which left Alexandria April 9, 1755, to defend the western frontier against the French and Indians."

There are several outcroppings of limestone on the site, and the center and east portions of the building are built over some of these outcroppings.

Outbuildings: None.

Prepared by:

Wesley Ivan Shenk, project historian, August 1972.